

## The Monthly Labor Review at 100—part I: the early years, 1915–30

*To help mark the Monthly Labor Review’s centennial, the editors invited several producers and users of BLS data to take a look back at the last 100 years. This opening article in a series of four recounts the early history of the federal government’s premier publication on labor economics and flagship journal of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

In July of 1915, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), under the direction of then-Commissioner Royal Meeker, began publishing a new journal whose purpose, as stated in the first issue, was to “publish the results of original investigations too brief for bulletin purposes, notices of labor legislation by the States or by Congress, and Federal court decisions affecting labor, which from their importance should be given attention before they could ordinarily appear in the bulletins devoted to these subjects.”

In addition, “Through the *Monthly Review*...[a]ttention will be given to the current work of this bureau, the other bureaus of the Department of Labor, or any other Government agencies dealing directly with labor matters. The bureau will aim to keep in touch with the current work of the various State labor bureaus,...the State industrial and workmen’s compensation commissions, the minimum wage commissions, factory and mine inspection offices, the State and municipal employment agencies, and a number of other offices regularly engaged in the study of questions and the publication of reports of special interest to labor....”

Furthermore, “A special purpose of the *Monthly Review* will be to make available...notices and summaries of American and foreign official reports of all bureaus, offices, and commissions of the character indicated above...to keep in touch with the more important current movements and methods for the reporting of industrial accidents and occupational or industrial diseases and for the prevention of these...[and] to report industrial and vocational surveys, the better housing of workingmen, and any other activities, public or private, that have for their object the betterment of industrial conditions [including] [s]ummaries of sickness and out-of-work or old-age benefit funds maintained by large employing corporations, national trade-unions, etc.”



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Thus sprang the aims and aspirations, the purposes and purview, the boundaries and bravura, of the fledgling *Monthly Labor Review*. Over the next hundred years, the *Review* would, from time to time, shift its focus, encompass more topics related to labor, add new departments and features, and modify its appearance, all the while continuing to address labor issues of major importance for the United States and the world. In this series of articles, on this, the one-hundredth anniversary of the federal government's most prominent and most read journal on labor, the *Review* recounts its long, sometimes tortuous, always interesting history through which runs the continuous thread of presenting the reader with timely, accurate information that sheds light on the voluminous labor statistics produced by companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations across the U.S. economy. In so doing, the *Review* invites the reader to take part in the telling of its fortunes, marking with it the starts and stops of historical economic events, the changes in emphasis, and the milestones achieved as the story unfolds. Today, a hundred years after its relatively inauspicious, but buoyantly optimistic start, the *Monthly Labor Review* stands as the premier government publication on labor economics and the flagship journal of BLS.

## Overview

One hundred years ago, BLS felt the need to fill the informational void it had created when, in July of 1912, it suspended the publication of a bimonthly bulletin on labor issues. Numerous labor-related events and statistics of the day had to be reported in order to keep government agencies, academic researchers, the business community, and, indeed, the general public informed. U.S. economic policy, new statistical measures, business decisions of all sorts, and even individual actions depended on the dissemination of information about the state of labor in the United States. BLS decided to establish the *Monthly Review* (later to become the *Monthly Labor Review*) for this important task.

This initial article recounts how the *Review* began, and continued, to fulfill the task that BLS had assigned it: the kinds of features the *Review* chose to adorn its pages; the topics it covered in the articles it presented; the workings of the U.S. Department of Labor, of state, local, and foreign departments of labor, and of other government agencies that it reported on; and the various statistics that it brought to light for its readers to contemplate, for government officials to use in formulating and implementing policy, and for academicians of all stripes to refer to in their published work. Also prominently featured is a sample of the authors who wrote for the *Review*, from the steady, dependable BLS economists, to “outside” authors working in other government agencies and in academia, to distinguished personages, including BLS commissioners themselves. Through it all, the pages of the early *Review* are laid open, and the tenor of the times made vivid, as the story of the beginning of the Department of Labor's preeminent journal unfolds.

## The first features

The very early issues of the *Review* had a number of features about the Department of Labor itself that were considered important enough to publish on a near-monthly or monthly basis. The Department was created by an act of Congress in 1913, not too long before the *Review* began publication in 1915 and 29 years after BLS was established in 1884. (BLS was incorporated into the Department the year the latter was created.) Among the eventful issues of the early 1900s was that of immigration. The Bureau of Immigration, including its Division of Information, was transferred to the Department of Labor along with BLS in 1913, and the Department felt that the public needed to know what was being done about securing jobs for immigrants. Thus was born the feature

“Federal employment work of the Department of Labor,” a listing of, among other things, the number of applications by immigrants for employment positions, and the number of actual hires, over a given period, from 1908 to June 1915 in the July 1915 issue and usually the previous month or two in subsequent issues. The feature brought to the public’s attention two important aspects of those years following the turn of the century: that, as in colonial America, immigrants were coming to the nation in impressive numbers and that the federal government was doing important work keeping track of not just how many had come, but also how many were being hired into gainful employment.



Along with the “Federal employment work” feature came two others related to work done by government: another Department of Labor feature, titled “Conciliation work of the Department of Labor,” first appearing together with the former in the July 1915 issue; and a piece on state and local departments of labor, initially titled “Work of state and municipal public employment bureaus” in the January 1916 issue, shortened to “State and municipal public employment bureaus” in February 1916, rebranded “Work of state and municipal employment bureaus” in March 1916, and expanded to “Work of state and municipal employment bureaus in the United States and of provincial employment bureaus in Canada” in October 1916. The “Conciliation” feature appeared monthly beginning in October 1915 and was a summary and listing of disputes mediated by the Department of Labor and of the results that ensued. As quoted in the July 1915 issue of the *Review*, Section 8 of the act of 1913 that created the Department of Labor declared, “That the Secretary of Labor shall have power to act as mediator and to appoint commissioners of conciliation in labor disputes whenever in his judgment the interests of industrial peace may

require it to be done.” In reporting on the exercise of this power, the *Review* described the strikes and lockouts that took place over a given period and recorded their number; the number of workers affected, both directly and indirectly; and whether mediation by the Department was accepted and, if so, what the result was—from “do,” meaning “still ongoing”; to “strike averted”; to “amicable adjustment”; to “unable to adjust”; and more.

The “State and municipal employment” feature, whatever its changing title, was states’ and localities’ attempt to capture employment statistics similar to those captured by the “Federal employment work” feature but extending to more than just immigrants. Statistics listed were the number of (1) applications from employers seeking workers, (2) workers sought, (3) people applying for work, (4) people referred for a job, and (5) positions filled. These statistics were reported initially only for U.S. cities but, later, through provincial employment bureaus in Montreal and Quebec City, also for cities in Canada. In July 1917, without citing any reason, the *Review* stopped publishing the “Federal employment work” feature, and the other two features lapsed in October 1917.

One can view the statistics given in the aforementioned three features as akin to the “Current labor statistics” feature that ran in the *Review* from July 1947 until June 2013—though on a much lesser scale. In neither case, however, was the feature considered the *Review*’s “bread and butter.” That honor goes to the many articles contributed by authors, both inside and outside of BLS. In the first couple of years, articles published were rarely credited to the authors who penned them: mostly, only the titles, and not the authors’ names, appeared. The first article with an author’s byline was “Occupational disease clinic of New York City Health Department,” by Alice Hamilton, MD; the article appeared in the November 1915 issue and was the only author-attributed article published in the *Review* that year. The year 1916 did not fare much better, with just nine articles (out of the hundreds of pieces appearing in the 12 issues published that entire year) crediting their authors. But by mid-1917, the *Review* apparently decided that it was important to cite the authors of at least certain articles, and thereafter did so with regularity. From then on until 1920, when he resigned his post at BLS to lead the Scientific Division of the International Labor Office, Commissioner Meeker was a not-infrequent contributor to the *Review*.

## The breadth of contributors and topics

During those early years and on through the 1920s, the *Review* had a bevy of steady, dependable authors. Besides the BLS commissioners themselves, Alice Hamilton, the first woman appointed to the faculty of Harvard University; Hugh S. Hanna, prolific author of books on labor laws and on workplace accidents and their prevention; Paul Brissenden, labor historian and professor of economics at Columbia University and New York University, best known for his 1919 work on the Industrial Workers of the World titled *The IWW: A study of American Syndicalism*; and BLS economists Leifur Magnusson (a native Icelander) and Alfred Maylander were consistent contributors. Among those also contributing were some of the most prominent academicians, including James T. Shotwell, Canadian-born American history professor at Columbia University, cofounder of the International Labour Organization, managing editor of the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and a scholar known for his influence in promoting the inclusion of a declaration of human rights in the United Nations charter. Topics and issues covered were wide ranging, spanning the gamut from employment and unemployment, to wages and work hours, to labor–management relations and collective bargaining, to pensions and health insurance, to workplace safety and health, and more—the vast majority still relevant today.<sup>1</sup> A sampling is illustrative:



*Employment and unemployment.* “Irregularity of employment,” with no author cited, examined that issue in three different contexts—in the women’s garment industry, in the results of a survey conducted by the American Association of Labor Legislation, and in the city of Philadelphia—in the March 1916 issue. BLS Commissioner Ethelbert Stewart’s March 1923 methodological piece titled “Trend of employment in the manufacturing industries in the United States, June, 1914, to December, 1921” compared four indexes of employment in manufacturing. “Unemployment in the United States,” an April 1928 report to the U.S. Senate by Secretary of Labor James J. Davis, cited worrisome employment losses in the nation between 1925 and early 1928. Finally, a regular feature on employment variously titled (e.g., “Employment in selected U.S. industries,” “Employment and unemployment,” “Trend of employment,” and related titles), beginning in January 1916 and running from then to July 1947 (when it merged with several other features to become “Current labor statistics”), kept readers up to date on the most recent employment and unemployment statistics.

*Wages and work hours.* In the June 1916 issue of the *Review*, the unattributed “Shorter hours for men as a public welfare measure” hailed an Oregon Supreme Court decision, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1916, to limit the number of hours that an employer could require an employee to work in mills, factories, and manufacturing establishments to no more than 10 hours per day. Clara E. Mortenson’s March 1920 article “Minimum wage for women in hotels and restaurants in District of Columbia” looked at a recommendation for a living wage set forth by the Minimum Wage Board of Washington, DC, for self-supporting women in two industries with a large proportion of female workers. BLS economist Mary Conyngton’s long, thoughtful piece on “The government’s wage policy during the last quarter century” in the June 1920 issue of the *Review* pondered the federal government’s salary policy—or lack thereof—toward its workers. Summing up the plight of workers’ decreasing purchasing power, the two-part article by BLS Commissioner Ethelbert Stewart titled “Are average wages keeping pace with the increased cost of living?” that appeared in the January and April 1926 issues of the *Review* showed concern on the part of government officials charged with improving the lives of everyday workers regarding whether that was in fact happening.

*Labor–management relations and collective bargaining.* A number of unattributed articles on collective bargaining agreements in various industries—the cloak, suit, and skirt industry (August 1915), the anthracite coal industry (April 1916), and the New York City dress and waist industry (March 1917)—stressed the beneficial role of collective bargaining in settling labor disputes peacefully and avoiding economically crippling strikes, as well as in building amicable employer–employee–union relationships. In “Employees’ representation in management of industry,” in the February 1920 issue of the *Review*, BLS Commissioner Royal Meeker expressed concern about the slippage of many U.S. factories and even whole industries into autocratic forms of management (perhaps borne of necessity) during World War I and proposed more democracy in employer–employee relations through worker–management committees, a furtherance of union representation, and more collective bargaining. Lastly, in his cautiously hopeful article “The industrial round table for conciliation in labor disputes” (June 1925), Marcus M. Marks, former Manhattan borough president, wrote about how labor–management problems “should be thought out, not fought out,” through the mechanism of roundtables that serve not only employers and employees, but also the general public, whose interests were often ignored in labor disputes.

*Pensions and health insurance.* Samuel M'Cune Lindsay, president of the American Association for Labor Legislation and professor of social legislation at Columbia University, wrote about the many benefits of social insurance in "Next steps in social insurance in the United States" in the February 1919 issue of the *Review* and speculated that "it will not be long before health insurance will be an established fact and its benefits made applicable to the great body of workmen." In "Health insurance," in the September 1919 issue, John A. Lapp and E. H. Lewinski-Corwin laid out the rational basis for a compulsory system of (at least statewide and maybe nationwide) health insurance designed to keep workers from being driven by illness "from a higher to a lower standard of life" and "from independence to dependence." In the January 1926 issue of the *Review*, Mary Conyngton's comprehensive "Industrial pensions for old age and disability" reviewed the status of private pension systems from both a national and a state-level perspective, seeking answers to a number of salient questions. Some of the answers she got might seem surprising to today's readers of the *Review*: unions of the day, on the whole, "look[ed] with disfavor upon such systems," and a number of U.S. courts found some pension systems unconstitutional; others might not be surprising: like many of today's employers, a large number of employers of the 1920s had plans whose "actuarial basis [was] ignored" and whose "reserve funds and annual appropriations appear[ed] to have been determined rather arbitrarily."



*Workplace safety and health.* The earliest issues of the *Review* exhibited an ongoing concern with the health and safety of workers, presenting a series of articles on particular diseases encountered in the workplace and particular industries in which they were encountered. Among the diseases cited were anilin poisoning (June 1916), anthrax (July 1916, January 1917), tuberculosis (July 1916), and nystagmus (August 1916). Industries

reported included the printing (December 1915), fur and felt-hat (December 1915, March 1916), garment (March 1916), coal-mining (August 1916), chemical (February 1917), and munitions (February 1917) industries. In back-to-back monthly articles, BLS Commissioner Royal Meeker touted the “Prevention of accidents by the statistical method” (March 1920) and lamented “The cost of industrial accidents” (April 1920) that was due to the absence or unreliability of appropriate statistics. Eight months later, Meeker’s articles were fittingly followed by subsequent BLS Commissioner Ethelbert Stewart’s “A plea for more adequate accident compensation rates” (December 1920). Focusing on the “Problems and importance of factory inspection” (July 1922), John P. Meade, the director of the Division of Industrial Safety of the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industry, pointed out that “work places should be made safe for employees” and that, when employer and employee join hands in a “determined...effort to reduce occupational accidents, improvement is inevitable.” Toward that end, Emery R. Hayhurst, professor of hygiene at The Ohio State University and consultant in industrial hygiene for the Ohio Department of Health, compiled the compendious “Occupational diseases: definition, cause, prevalence, and prevention” (July 1929).

*The “Great War,” child labor, and women’s issues.* Some topics discussed in the early *Review* were particular to the times. The need to provide for U.S. troops disabled in World War I inspired a number of early *Review* articles. Unattributed, and begun 6 months after U.S. entry into the war, “Provision for disabled soldiers” (October 1917) detailed how the U.S. government aimed to rehabilitate injured soldiers and fit them to become productive wage earners upon their return to civilian life. Carl Hookstadt, an official of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, continued the narrative with the feature “Provision for disabled soldiers and civilians” (March 1918), which appeared as “Provision for disabled soldiers” and under similar titles alternately with a related feature, “Provision for the disabled and vocational education,” until August 1918. Begun in April 1918 by Mrs. M. A. Gadsby and appearing fairly regularly under similar titles through December 1921, “Provision for the disabled and vocational education” cited the war as a “remarkable impetus toward vocational education.”

Child labor was another issue that concerned both economists and the public in the early days of the *Review*. Numerous articles devoted to the topic appeared regularly, and there was even a monthly feature on child labor. The state of Maryland was at the forefront of efforts to regulate (though not abolish—that would come later) child labor. A farsighted, penetrating unattributed article titled “Child labor in Maryland, 1915” in the August 1916 issue of the *Review* began the discussion by detailing the status of child labor in the state and the extent to which it was being dealt with legislatively. In 1915, 18 percent of the more than 155,000 children between the ages of 10 and 16 in Maryland were “gainfully employed” in occupations of all kinds, including some that today would be considered dangerous. The article touted a new law that went into effect on June 1, 1916, and that incorporated “a principle of child-labor legislation long contended for by advocates of child-labor reform.” The year 1921 saw two articles that bore on the topic of child labor in quite different ways. Helen Sumner Woodbury’s “Working children of Boston” in the January issue decried the deplorable conditions under which children labored, even in a relatively enlightened city whose legal regulations were among the most stringent in the nation. The article noted the ubiquitous nature of child labor problems, which “arise wherever the work of undeveloped young persons is used primarily for profit instead of primarily for training.” The author did not shy away from concluding that children who had left school to work in industry were left “permanently handicapped, in most cases for life,” by having forgone further education that would have equipped them not only with an understanding of the world but, ironically, with knowledge that would have enabled them to adapt to changing industrial conditions. In April’s “The trend of child labor in the United States, 1913 to 1920,” Nettie P. McGill, of the Department of Labor’s Children’s Bureau, cited the paucity of



statistical data on child labor in the nation, but still managed to conclude that child labor, both legal and illegal, remained an ever-present problem during the second decade of the 20th century. In particular, World War I produced forces that impelled children into industry, to contribute both to their families' increasing cost of living and to the country's new wartime needs. In 1928, an unattributed article focused on "Vocational education for farm children," lauding the accomplishments of the 4-H Club, founded just a quarter century earlier. Among the organization's achievements recounted in the article were (1) the newfound ability of the youths to persuade their parents to adopt better farm and home practices, (2) the instilment of leadership qualities in the children, (3) the newly sparked interest in learning in the children, many of whom had dropped out of school, and (4) the cultivation in the youths of the desire to remain on the farm and to look upon farming as an attractive career, a trait judged especially valuable in an era when many (more than a million in 1925 alone) were leaving the farm to pursue other careers. (Of course, we now know that this achievement did little to slow the flow of migrants from farms to cities.)



Even some issues that one might think gained currency only relatively recently—women's issues, for example—were discussed and examined in the early years of the *Review*. Practically from its inception, the *Review* had a regular feature, "Women in industry," that, as the name suggests, brought women's workplace concerns to the forefront of attention. As early as the September 1915 issue, the unattributed article "Women in industry in recent state reports" focused on the low wages that women were receiving in many industries and in all states. Selecting California, Connecticut, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, and Pennsylvania from among a larger number of states commissioning studies of women's employment and earnings, the article emphasized those states' consideration of minimum-wage legislation or formation of minimum-wage boards, with a poignant discussion of the beneficial effect that raising the minimum wage would have on women in particular. The "Women in industry" feature



regularly examined the variety of industries that women were working in, sometimes by choice, sometimes by necessity, including the necessity of carrying on the work of men who had gone off to fight in World War I. The shift in women's work—indeed, women's work *opportunities*—caused by the war was remarkable, and the *Review* did not fail to take notice, especially in the “Women in industry” feature. The shift was plain for every reader to see; the discussion began in November 1916 with the unattributed “Millinery as a trade for women,” a summary of Lorinda Perry's book of the same name, and progressed through “Domestic service: its advantages and drawbacks as a wage-earning occupation” (March 1917) and “Opportunities for women in domestic science” (April 1917) (both unattributed), Benjamin M. Squires' feature article “Women street railway employees” (May 1918), and the “Women in industry” pieces “Women in the mechanical trades in the United States,” by (Mrs.) V. B. Turner (September 1918), the unattributed “Women in the mechanical trades in the United States” (also September 1918) and “War-time employment of women in the metal trades” (October 1918), and “Employment of women in acetylene welding,” by Helen G. Fisk (May 1919). In a different, broader, perhaps normative vein, the 1920s produced two “Women in industry” articles that recounted the shortcomings of government in two vital aspects affecting the working situation of women. In January 1920, the unattributed “Women in the government service” summarized a Women's Bureau (an agency of the Department of Labor) report calling attention to the exclusion of women from certain civil service examinations—an exclusion resulting in a gender gap in government jobs. At the time, women were excluded from taking tests for 155 scientific and other professional occupations open to men only. Among the tests that women were disqualified from taking were those for occupations and careers involving investigations into “animal parasites,...the mechanical properties of wood,...drug and oil plant cultivating,...tobacco breeding,...the physiology of gas poisoning,” and more. The rationale behind these exclusions was, at best, puzzling because women were permitted to take examinations (1) for jobs involving “testing food and drugs to determine their nutritive and medical quantities,” but not for jobs involving the testing of dyes, and (2) for the occupations of assistant weather observer and assistant horticulturist, but not for jobs involving climatology in relation to agriculture.

In the second unattributed piece, the article examined the “Effects of labor legislation on employment opportunities for women” (November 1928), recounting the events that took place at the Women's Industrial Conference held in Washington, DC, in January 1926 and sponsored by the Women's Bureau. At the conference, it was suggested that much state and federal legislation handicapped women in their bid to get and hold employment and that the Women's Bureau conduct a study to ascertain the facts at hand. The “Women in industry” article presented the results of the study. Perhaps surprisingly, the study found that legislation regulating the hours of work of women and prohibiting them from working at night did not significantly discriminate against women in the manufacturing industries examined (the boot and shoe, clothing, electrical products, hosiery, and paper box industries) or in “stores” (i.e., retail establishments such as grocery stores and clothing stores) and restaurants. Nor was such legislation a significant factor in six particular occupations studied: elevator operators, pharmacists, streetcar conductors and ticket agents, coremakers (makers of sand or wax molds used in the production of metal castings), metal trades, and printing and publishing. However, other, purely prohibitory legislation was found to discriminate against women, eliminating them from the occupations covered, four of which were examined in the study: grinding, polishing, and buffing occupations; electric and acetylene welding; taxicab driving; and gas and electric meter reading. Lest one rejoice at the finding that few industries and occupations were found to have been affected by labor legislation that was potentially discriminatory against women, a theme throughout the study was that other, mostly social factors had more of a discriminatory effect on working women than did the labor legislation. For example, regarding pharmacists, “the small number of women qualified for pharmacy, prejudice

against women, lack of confidence in them, and the physical requirements of the work are the main things... holding women back in this occupation.” Summing up, the authors said, “At present, public opinion does not place a woman on a par with a man pharmacist.” Similarly, in the restaurant industry, “There is a very general feeling among managers of what might be called first-class restaurants” (i.e., restaurants that give “formal service, where the waiters get high tips, that run special suppers after the theater” and “where employment after 10 o’clock at night would be especially desirable”) “that the public desires men for the type of service expected in such places.” The existence of such blatant, *generally accepted* discrimination and prejudice is dismaying, and the reason for its widespread acceptance at the time stood to be (and perhaps was) investigated, but, of course, not in the *Review*, whose policy then was (as it still is now) to be “above the fray,” always observing and ever informative, but apolitical.

*International perspective.* Finally, as might—or might not—be expected, international labor issues were well represented in early *Review* articles. At the very outset, an unattributed feature variously titled “Employment in various countries,” “Employment in various foreign countries,” “Employment in foreign countries,” and “Employment conditions in foreign countries” ran fairly regularly from the very first issue of the *Review* to January 1917. The initial, July 1915, issue discussed recently reported employment situations in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland; and the August issue followed up with further reports from Germany and Great Britain. The December 1915 issue offered reports from Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. The European or European-origin (Australia and Canada) focus of the feature was evident, but not unexpected in a journal published in a country with European roots at a time when Europe itself was enmeshed in a “Great War.” The feature appeared again in March and July 1916 and culminated with reports on Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden in January 1917. Why the feature was discontinued then is unknown, but that is not to say that the *Review* ceased discussing employment in foreign countries: the employment situation in a particular country would come up not infrequently in brief sections of a broader feature variously titled “Employment and unemployment,” “Employment, unemployment, and labor supply,” “Trend of employment,” “Trend of employment and pay rolls,” “Trend of employment, earnings, and hours,” and “Trends of employment and labor turn-over” that presented statistics and commentary chiefly, but not exclusively, on employment and unemployment in the United States and ran from October 1917 all the way through June 1947.

And often accompanying these features on foreign employment were full articles on many other aspects of international labor, penned by both well-known and not-so-well-known (but eminently qualified) writers. The first of these writers was the Australian politician and judge Henry Bournes Higgins, whose February 1916 article, “Industrial peace in Australia through minimum wage and arbitration,” likened the chaos produced by the “war between the profit maker and the wage earner” to that ushered in by World War I, with the former producing “in the long run as much loss and suffering” as the latter, “not only to the actual combatants, but also to the public.” Higgins proposed the Australian Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, over which he presided from 1907 to 1920, as an example of a solution to the industrial chaos he saw, a solution based on reason, one in which “the process of conciliation, with arbitration in the background, is substituted for the rude and barbarous processes of strike and lockout,...all in the interest of the public.” It is no stretch to say that, despite the 31-year gap in their establishment, the Australian court and the U.S. National Labor Relations Board have much in common.

The early *Review* featured articles on issues affecting countries all over the globe. In a June 1917 article titled “What France is doing for her disabled soldiers and sailors,” reprinted from the British journal *Progress*, Sir Percy Alden, member of the English Parliament from 1906 to 1918, pointed to France as a model to follow in ameliorating the sorrowful conditions faced by returning disabled French servicemen during the first 8 months of World War I. Likening the extant British “poor law” to the French *assistance publique*, both of which “would offend the spirit of any self-respecting nation,” Alden cited the numerous achievements made by France in just a few years in bettering the lives of its disabled soldiers and sailors returning from war and urged Britain to emulate the French example. And in an attempt to bring home the results of peace negotiations after the war and their implications for workers, J. T. Shotwell, Columbia University professor and subsequent coarchitect of the Charter of the United Nations, listed the 41 “Labor provisions in the peace treaty” of Versailles in the August 1919 issue of the *Review*. The treaty, of course, established the League of Nations, and Shotwell’s role in formulating the pact’s labor provisions was matched only by his authorship of the provisions establishing the International Labour Organization.

The list of countries covered by the early *Review* stretched from the aforementioned Australia and France to nations of Asia and Latin America. Representative countries were *Canada* (F. A. Acland, “Labor conditions in Canada as affected by the war,” June 1917, and Benjamin M. Squires, “The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of Canada,” September 1917); *Mexico* (Ethel C. Yohe, “Protection of workers under Mexican state labor laws,” December 1923, “Comparison of workmen’s compensation laws of the Mexican states,” February 1924, and “Labor law of Jalisco, Mexico,” June 1924); the *United Kingdom* (G. D. H. Cole, “National guilds movement in Great Britain,” July 1919, and Henry J. Harris, “The British national health insurance system, 1911–1919,” January 1920, and “British National Health Insurance Act of May 20, 1920”); *France* and *Belgium* (Mary T. Waggaman, “Expansion of the ‘family-wage’ system in France and Belgium,” October 1923); *Germany* (Alfred Maylander, “Wages in Germany,” December 1917, and “German Metal Workers’ Federation study of the German automobile industry,” March 1925, Anna Kalet, “Effect of the war on working children in Germany,” July 1921, Emil Frankel, “How Germany settles industrial disputes,” September 1923, and Fritz Kummer, “Trade-union movement of Germany and its problems,” March 1926, and “The German Federation of Labor—its strength and organization,” December 1928); *Austria* (Fritz Rager, “Chambers of labor in Austria,” February 1927); *Norway* (Reginald Heber Smith, “Conciliation procedure in the administration of justice in Norway,” June 1926); *Estonia* (Andrew Pranspill, “Land law of Esthonia,” April 1924); *Brazil* (Ethelbert Stewart, “The new immigration quotas, former quotas, and immigration intakes,” August 1924, James A. Rowan, “Trade-union movement and wages in Brazil,” September 1925, and “Old age and disability retirement law for railway employees in Brazil,” December 1925, and Moisés Poblete Troncoso, “Labor movement in Brazil,” July 1929); *Uruguay* (Percy A. Martin and Earl M. Smith, “Labor legislation in Uruguay,” October 1927); *Cuba* (Moisés Poblete Troncoso, “Labor legislation in Cuba and certain Central American countries,” September 1929); *China* (Ta Chen, “Wages and hours of labor in five Chinese cities, 1917 and 1920,” August 1921, “Shipping strike in Hongkong,” May 1922, and “Labor conditions in China,” November 1924, and S. K. Sheldon Tso, “The unionization of labor in China,” November 1927, and “Labor movement in China,” August 1928); *Japan* (Ta Chen, “Labor conditions in Japan,” November 1925); and *India* (Rajani Kanta Das, “Rise of factory labor in India,” March 1922).

## Conclusion



In sum, the early *Review* was both like and unlike its later editions. Like them, it had recurring features that presented tables with the latest labor statistics; articles that examined labor-related issues of the day; a “stable” of authors, both inside and outside BLS, who contributed regularly to the journal; and many topics for discussion that are still recognizable and timely today. Unlike later editions, however, the fledgling *Review* had numerous unattributed articles and features; had no charts, graphs, or maps; and included a number of topics that would receive little or no attention in today’s *Review* (e.g., industrial poisons and the diseases they were held to cause; food control in the United States during wartime; child labor, which is illegal, or at least regulated, in the nation today; and even eugenics—see Warren S. Thompson, “Eugenics as viewed by a sociologist,” in the February 1924 issue). Thus, the *Review* has changed over the years, clearly reflecting both the different issues that became important with the passing decades and the technological advances in the publishing industry, but maintaining continuity amid the change by presenting the same *kinds* of timely features and articles, by a passel of authors of the same consistent writing ability, from decade to decade. The next installment in this series of articles brings out both the change and the continuity, the growing pains and the underlying stability, of the “adolescent” *Monthly Labor Review*.

#### SUGGESTED CITATION

Brian I. Baker, "The Monthly Labor Review at 100—part I: the early years, 1915–30," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2016, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2016.20>.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Besides the sampling of articles listed next, there were regular, usually monthly, sometimes less frequent, features on each of these topics listing current statistics related to them. Though separate, these features, combined, were similar to the “Current labor statistics” feature begun in the July 1947 issue of the *Review*.

#### RELATED CONTENT

##### Related Articles

[Celebrating 100 years of the Monthly Labor Review](#), *Monthly Labor Review*, July 2015.

[The Monthly Labor Review turns 100](#), *Monthly Labor Review*, July 2015.

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